

**Ambassador Ries' interview with  
Anihnefseis [Tracings] TV political talk show – ET-3 state run TV  
Interviewer: Pantelis Savvidis  
Hyatt Regency, February 5, 2007**

**Transcript**

**Mr. Savvidis:** Mr. Ambassador thank you for agreeing to do this interview.

**Amb. Ries:** Thank you very much; I am delighted to be here.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Did the recent terror attack create any problems? Did it cause any strain in the Greek American relationship?

**Amb. Ries:** No, not at all. In fact the recent terror attack is as much an attack on Greece as it is on the United States Embassy and so we have been working very closely together to try and find those who undertook this very stupid and awful attack, and it's our hope that we will succeed.

**Mr. Savvidis:** There is no problem between the two countries?

**Amb. Ries:** No, no our relations are better than ever. They, Greek-American relations, have not been this good in recent memory I don't think. Don't you agree?

**Mr. Savvidis:** Yes. Some terrorists Mr. Ambassador, some terrorists' attacks can happen anywhere in the world why should the government or even a whole society feel guilty for such an act of terror?

**Amb. Ries:** I do not know that the government does feel guilty. I think that the government is angry. All the progress in Greece in terms of capturing terrorists who were murdering many more Greek citizens than American citizens or British citizens, and the reputation of the country as a safe place as a place to do business and a place to visit has been undermined by these few stupid people. So the Government, I think should not feel guilty. It should feel as we do, angry and want to catch them and convict them because they have hurt the interests of all Greeks

**Mr. Savvidis:** It would be interesting for us to know what your services believe about this last attack, would you consider it as the continuation of the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, or could it be that there is a new organization behind it.

**Amb. Ries:** I do not think it is a simple either or, but I think until we find them, and find those who are responsible, interview them, find out what their reason is for this, bring a case against them and convict them we will not really know who they are. There are a lot of theories. There is this group, Revolutionary Struggle that has come up with this five-page tirade claiming credit for it, and so, absent any other evidence it is reasonable to assume that there is some group that may be a continuation, that may be inspired by, that may be completely new that is undertaking this. But fundamentally until we capture them we will not know, but sometimes there is indirection, you suggest something to take people off the trail. The key is to find those who are responsible.

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**Mr. Savvidis:** Do you believe that now we are in a new terrorist period?

**Amb. Ries:** I think it is too early to tell. I think that we will find it is very important to improve the security posture, at least at my embassy will increase the security posture. It is already quite high but there are some more things we can do and we will try to do them. But as the investigation continues and we find out more, we will adapt accordingly.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Greek people for instance believe that the 17 of November has been dismantled. What do you think?

**Amb. Ries:** Well, I have been asked this question a number of times and the way I look at it is that there are loose ends for sure of the 17<sup>th</sup> of November investigation. There were two murders that there was never anyone found guilty of those murders, the one of Welch and the one of Captain Tsantes. In addition the gun, the famous gun is still missing; the famous stamp is still missing. Presumably there are those who know where those things are, there are those who have been released from prison and are on the outside for health reasons. So there are loose ends. I am not saying, I would not say it is November 17 itself, as it was for so many years, endangering so many Greeks as well as foreigners, but there are loose ends from the investigation that need to be tightened up and followed to the end.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Are you satisfied with the cooperation of the Greek services as far as the subject of terrorism goes?

**Amb. Ries:** Yes, Minister Polydoros has our full confidence, he and Chief Dimoshakis and General Syrras and the people in the counter-terrorism service and all the other services are working very hard, following all the leads. We are not displeased in any way.

**Mr. Savvidis:** About the Balkans now. Will you consider a de-stabilization in Southeast Europe because of the Kosovo solution?

**Amb. Ries:** No, I think the Kosovo solution will bring stabilization in the Western Balkans. The reason we need to move to final status for Kosovo now, on the basis of the plan that Mr. Ahtisaari is presenting, is because it will bring stabilization, economic and political stability and growth, which is very good for Greece, particularly for Northern Greece. The status quo, what we are now, is not sustainable, and if we wait we will see destabilization. That is why we need to take these difficult decisions now, it is after all eight years after the 1999 NATO action to rescue the people of Kosovo from the situation that they found themselves in. It is now time to put in place the final building blocks to set up a stable, lasting solution.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Are you in agree with the Ahtisaari proposal?

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**Amb. Ries:** Yes the United States thinks the Ahtisaari proposal is a very good basis from which to work. There are now, between now and the end of March to tweak the final measures and it is our hope that both sides will engage seriously in those negotiations to improve it in a mutually agreeable way. We think that President Ahtisaari has done a good job.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Was the main points in this proposal it is not possible to change:

**Amb. Ries:** The proposal itself has been compromised. It provides a lot of guarantees for the Serbian population of Kosovo, the rights of self governance at the municipal level guarantees for the religious sites; protections for the religious sites. It provides for transparent funding from Serbia for these municipalities and it provides for the Albanian population of Kosovo a true prospect of being self governed for the future.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Serbian interests do not agree about this...

**Amb. Ries:** Right I am aware of that.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Is this a problem?

**Amb. Ries:** We anticipated that the Serbian leadership would not agree to this proposal, we understand it is difficult for them, but we think it is important to the future of the region, as well as the Serbian population of Kosovo reach an agreement on this outline. It is not just the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy; all of the major Western European countries that have been involved in this for so long also think it is a fair basis for a final settlement.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Without thinking of the Kosovo case, what do you think? Are today's borders in the Balkans definitive?

**Amb. Ries:** We think that they are, that moving border lines is probably a very destabilizing measure, and one of the elements in the proposal that I should have mentioned is that this new entity of Kosovo cannot join with any other state, so that the borders of the province of Kosovo now would stay the borders of this entity.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Do you believe that it is possible to create a great Albania?

**Amb. Ries:** No I do not. I mean this proposal specifically rules that out and the Albanian government has ruled it out as well.

**Mr. Savvidis:** No not from this proposal.

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**Amb. Ries:** Yes, on the basis of this proposal and the UN Security Council resolution that would be adopted to put this proposal into force would specifically rule out joining Kosovo with any other country. That is one of the specific provisions of this proposal

**Mr. Savvidis:** Your administration has previously recognized our neighboring country with the name Macedonia causing us bitterness on the Greek side. Are you now speaking seriously of pleading for a name accepted by both sides?

**Amb. Ries:** We have, yes it is true that we have adopted their constitutional name in bi-lateral relations between the United States and the Republic of Macedonia, but we did that understanding that it was not popular here in Greece, but for reasons relating to trying to preservation of the Ohrid framework agreement in Macedonia and to prevent that country from falling apart which would have been bad for the stability of the Balkans. Since we have made that move we have continued to support strongly the efforts of the UN secretary General Special Envoy Matthew Nimetz to solve the problem and we are heartened that there seems to be new momentum in this effort. We have said that whatever is worked out by Mr. Nimetz between Skopje and Athens, we will apply ourselves in our own bi-lateral relations. In the meantime there is an agreement reached in 1995, the so-called interim agreement, that provides for the use of FYROM. And FYROM is the name under which the country is proceeding to negotiate its membership in NATO and the EU and that remains the practice until there is some other agreement.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Do you believe that a common solution...is possible?

**Amb. Ries:** Yes, yes certainly. In 2005 Matthew Nimetz made a proposal that the Greek state Foreign Minister Molyviatis accepted as a basis for negotiation that would be using the terminology Republica Macedonia Skopje. That was a reasonable basis, Skopje itself has not been prepared to negotiate on that basis but some solution is certainly possible, it ca not be beyond the creativity of man to come up with a solution that will work. It is very important; people do not realize how good the relations are between Athens and Skopje. Greeks are the biggest investors in the country, it seems that the countries can be better friends and that there is no reason to have this kind of tension, no substantive reason for this kind of tension, it is one in which history and emotion play too big a role.

**Mr. Savvidis:** What would you say is the US strategic interest in South Eastern Europe, and would you cooperate with those countries in issues such as the pipelines, natural gas, etc.?

**Amb. Ries:** Our basic strategic interest in the region is its stability; political, economic, stability and prosperity of the region, and because throughout the 1990s, instability, the wars that took place in the Balkans, threatened our interests and those of our European allies. Our strategic interest is that this part of the world be peaceful and prosperous, because otherwise it is sort of a black hole between Greece and the rest of the European

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Union. Greece, Bulgaria and Romania and the rest of the EU. You have crime, trafficking in persons; you have a lot of problems that come with instability and political immaturity of organizations. So what we want to see is a stronger, economically and politically Western Balkans, integrated, aiming toward EU membership, integrated with Euro-Atlantic institutions. Now more trade in the region, freer trade in the region, is an instrument in that goal, energy trade in particular is an instrument towards that goal. It helps countries that do not have much in the way of energy resources meet their economic need at a lower cost, it helps them to be competitive, oil, gas pipelines, these all will help development in the region, but our goal is not, at least in the US, it is not oil or gas or power for their own sake. It is in order to promote the growth and development of the region that is in our interest, that is in Greece's interest, that is in the interest of the rest of Europe.

**Mr. Savvidis:** From what you say Mr. Ambassador do we suppose that your government is interested for the prosperity of the European Union?

**Amb. Ries:** Yes, prosperity, on of the things that is sometimes misunderstood about the US. The US has supported European integration from the very beginning.

**Mr. Savvidis:** What kind of European Union?

**Ambassador Ries:** The kind we have. The United States, with the Marshal Plan, sixty years ago this year, gave money to rebuild Europe after World War II on the condition, and people forget this, on the condition that that the countries build integration. We required that European countries Germany, France and Italy create institutions to share the money and to jointly establish proprieties for integration, that lead to the European Coal and Steel Community, that lead to the Treaty of Rome and the European community, and the European Union. Every step of the way, including the creation of the Euro, the adoption of the Justice and Home Affairs as a common competence of the EU, the United States has supported. We have felt that strengthened Europe, the EU has been in our interest, and in common foreign and security policy for example, foreign policy of Europe, we have supported it because more often than not the EU policy has been parallel and supportive of the directions that we thought they would sense. So a strong prosperous Europe is very much in our interest.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Mr. Ambassador, Greece has behaved most properly as far as her relations are concerned mainly keeping in mind the allowing of Turkey in to the EU. As an experienced diplomat could you say that the other side shows that appropriate good intentions?

**Amb. Ries:** Well, as I often say on that issue, I am the American Ambassador to Greece, not the American Ambassador to Turkey, and I feel somewhat awkward commenting on Turkish policy but I do agree with you that the Greek policy toward Turkey and the EU

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has been farsighted and strategic. It has been very much in Greece's interest that Turkey be engaged in and aiming towards full membership in the EU, and as the Prime Minister says full compliance for full membership. There is nothing wrong with that strategy, and it is a good one, one that the United States is completely in agreement with. I think that PM Erdogan, since 2002 when he came into office, has undertaken multiple forms of the constitution, eight I think the last time I looked at it, eight or nine forms of the constitutions have dramatically increased the scope of human rights within Turkey and has improved the economic performance of the country and made it a serious candidate for the EU, which is why the EU itself in 2004 decided to start negotiations, which have started now. And has everything gone smoothly? No it has not, that is why in December of last year the European Union decided to suspend negotiations on eight chapters of the thirty-five chapters that are needed to agree on the transition, on the thirty-five chapters of the *acquis communautaire* of the European law you need in order to be a candidate for membership, but the Turkish state seems very much to us to be serious about trying to undertake this very important task and everyone understands that it will take a long time.

**Mr. Savvidis:** The theme Islamic minority derives from the Lausanne Treaty Mr. Ambassador why does Washington keep speaking of a Turkish minority?

**Amb. Ries:** I have said all that I really want to say on the subject of minorities last fall and the United States government said it last fall. We have explained this a number of times and I do not think that it is productive to play with the semantics.

**Mr. Savvidis:** The Greek Foreign Minister announced last week certain measures concerning this minority. Would you suggest this minority is restricted in its rights?

**Amb. Ries:** We think that Greece, as a country, is a model country in terms of its respect for Human Rights. Every country, including the United States, there are points at which we are not perfect. We think Greece is a very, very good member of the EU and strongly defends individual rights and upholds the highest standards.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Mr. Ambassador, Turkey has problems with all of the neighboring countries in the region. Is this a problem for the United States?

**Amb. Ries:** I think that Greek-Turkish relations are quite good, they are much better than they were a decade ago. The relationship between Prime Minister Erdogan and Prime Minister Karamanlis is actually quite good, and we had the chairman in charge of the Turkish General's staff in Athens in the fall and reached a number of tension reducing arrangements with his counterpart Admiral Chinofotis. So I do not think Turkish relations with Greece are bad, nor with Bulgaria, nor for that matter with their other neighbors. But as I say, I am the Ambassador to Greece and I feel awkward talking about Turkish policy.

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**Mr. Savvidis:** Would you give us a comment on the Turkish reaction to the searching for oil in this sea region? This is a great problem also and you are the ambassador to Greece but...

**Amb. Ries:** The United States made two points about this last week. Cyprus is a sovereign country and can make agreements as it sees fit and has made agreements with us, and two, the concern about this development only reinforces the need for attention to the Cyprus problem itself and try to solve the basic Cyprus problem. And we are very hopeful that the process that was begun last July, under Secretary General of the UN Gambari, will lead to re-engagement on the substantive issues because we think that it make no sense to further delay the discussion of the basis of reunifying the island of Cyprus.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Yes but the Cyprus problem is something else from this.

**Amb. Ries:** The Cyprus problem is urgent and needs solving, and if it was solved then this would not be a problem. A re-unified Cyprus either bi-zone or bi-communal federation would reach any agreements it wanted and the benefits would be shared by the people of the island. Presumably that is something that Greece is also interested in, that is a permanent unification of the island, removal of foreign troops and so forth and that is why it is urgent to get this going again.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Would you like to say something more?

**Amb. Ries:** I would like to say a little bit about why I am here in Thessaloniki. I am here for the annual cutting of the Vasilopita for the American Hellenic Chamber of Commerce. The American Hellenic Chamber of Commerce is a big part of the business community here in Thessaloniki and this is, for me, basically a business development, trade and investment promotion trip. We think this region, Makedonia, is one of the most important business centers for Greece and also this is a part of Greece that stands to gain the most from the stability and economic growth of the Balkans. So for American companies we look at northern Greece as a logical platform for sales and development of markets throughout the region, so the theme of my being here today is to talk about business and trade relations, and we are quite optimistic.

**Mr. Savvidis:** Are there significant American companies in Northern Greece?

**Amb. Ries:** There are and hopefully there will be more. Thank you very much

**Mr. Savvidis:** Thank you Mr. Ambassador.